

A London Report

The English Still Know How To Take It

HENRY C. WOLFE

THE Luftwaffe is still raiding London. There was a raid every night during my final week there. Not big raids, of course. Veterans of the 1940-41 Blitz are not impressed by "what old Jerry" can do now. These night attacks are brief affairs, usually staged by small groups of from six to fifteen planes. For this purpose Goering is using fighter-bombers, machines that can come in fast, drop their cargo, and streak away, with a chance to outrun the RAF night-fighters. They seem to be mostly ME-410's.

In these hit-and-run forays the Nazis make little, if any, effort to aim at special targets. They do little damage of a military nature. But they usually hit something, often an apartment or a tenement house. And they nearly always leave destruction and death in their wake.

Londoners speak of this type of air raid as a "Goebbels." The Reich's propaganda minister, it is assumed, insists that for the record he has to tell the blitzed Germans that the British are being hit too. So Goering sends a few planes over Britain for the propaganda effect inside Germany.

Though these 1943 raids are a far cry from the historic attacks of 1940 and 1941, they make an exciting show for newcomers. Searchlights criss-crossing over the sky, the bursting flak, the destruction of some of the raiders—against London's incredible blackout these are a thrilling sight. But it's a pretty grim performance for people who have been through years of it.

An air raid is usually a tragedy for somebody. Some building comes out of it rubble. More often than not it is a humble home. Pathetic crushed bodies are dug out of the wreckage. During my stay in London people were talking about Edith Durant. A bomb got her little house. Her husband, her nine-months-old baby, her parents, her brother, and her husband's sister were killed instantly. Of all the household Edith alone survived. It took the heavy rescue squads thirteen and a half hours to dig her out. All night long this brave young woman, her legs crushed, her face heaped with plaster and dust, kept up her spirits. She called words of encouragement to her rescuers: "I'm all right. . . . Don't you worry about me. . . . I've been through it before. . . . I'll make you a good

cup of tea when I get out of here." Edith Durant symbolized the unblitzable spirit of London's little people.

Every night there are Londoners sleeping in the underground stations. Some of them suffer from "Blitz nerves," others prefer to sleep there because they will not be disturbed by sirens, flak, or bombs. And even though they tell you today's small raids are a welcome change from the fire and horror of the Blitz, they all know they are living close to the war front. It is only eighty-five miles from the Nazi-held French coast to London. In a matter of minutes a fighter-bomber can cover this distance.

The proximity of constant danger, the depressing effects of the blackout, and the crowded conditions of a wartime capital—old London lives through it all for just one moment. That is the moment of Prime Minister Churchill's first post-war order, "Lights on!"

If you go to London you may not be too much shocked at first by the changes, physical and otherwise, that you will find. You will not find a city in ruins. You can walk from Piccadilly to Oxford Circus without seeing a building that shows marks of the Blitz. Or from Trafalgar Square down Whitehall to the Houses of Parliament

and hardly come across a reminder that the Luftwaffe has been over London. In Trafalgar Square itself there are not many signs of Goering's aerial frightfulness. True, one of the fine old lions at the base of Nelson's monument had a right foreleg blown off. But St. Martins-in-the-Fields, overlooking Trafalgar, stands serenely, with only minor damage to its basement.

If you want to see factual evidence of what the Blitz has done to British cultural shrines, no better medium could be used than "The Bombed Buildings of Britain."* Graphic pictures and text make this an outstanding pictorial record of what Britain endured during the days of the Luftwaffe's power. Some of these wrecked structures can be restored; others are gone forever. And still others will carry their marks of Nazi fury and destruction for all time. In coming years another generation, contemplating these pictures, may well ask: "How did the British ever live through such concentrated devastation?"

THE newly arrived visitor to England may conclude that the country has not suffered much from the air raids. This is especially true if he came expecting to find London half destroyed. As his ancient taxi threads its way through left-drive traffic, he may see only an occasional wrecked building. He probably does not realize that some of the empty structures he sees are little better than the ruins that appall him. They are nothing bet-

*THE BOMBED BUILDINGS OF BRITAIN. Edited by J. M. Richards. New York: Oxford University Press. 1943. 140 pp. \$4.50.



—From "The Bombed Buildings of Britain." Book browsing after a blitz. Londoners make their usual rounds of the library at Holland House.

ter than shells; no one can live or work in them. They remain standing because, with a war to win, the British have no time to pull them down. And the visitor may not perceive at first glance that some of the open spaces he passes were the sites of buildings smashed by the Luftwaffe.

But drive out to St. Paul's and stark havoc confronts you. The cathedral has been hit by two bombs. Fortunately neither did major damage. But it is not just the scars in the cathedral which betray the fury of the bombings. It is the area behind St. Paul's. There is only a void. Not a shell of a building, not a charred wall, stands. The bombs and the fires that followed wiped out block after block of this historic old neighborhood. It is one striking example of the widespread damage the Nazis have inflicted on London. No, the British capital did not get off easily.

Nor did other British towns. Dover, Plymouth, Hull, Canterbury, Liverpool, Coventry, Belfast—the roll of martyr cities is long. Each bears terrible reminders of the destruction Hitler could wreak on his victims when the Luftwaffe was strong and its opponents were just coming into their strength. Some of these places were struck to break Britain's military economy. Others were bombed to crack civilian morale. Still others were the target of the "Baedeker raids." The Heinkels and Focke-Wulfs blasted old towns which appealed primarily to tourists. Canterbury was one of these. It was pure Hunnishness to wreck their cathedrals and their other cultural shrines.

But London was always the main target of the Luftwaffe. It was the political, economic, and military capital of the Empire. It housed millions of people. If Hitler could break their morale and make them cry for peace his battle would be all but won. He knew it and the British Government knew it. When the Luftwaffe swooped in against London in 1940 its objective was not just the buildings of the city as such. The real target was the populace. The Nazis believed that they could break these people. The cockneys would never be able to take the air war. Or so the Nazi leadership reasoned.

The brunt of the Luftwaffe's attack fell on the poor sections of the city. Mayfair was hit, but nothing like Bermondsey, Shoreditch, and the London docks. The latter were repeatedly and mercilessly blasted. The R.A.F. struck back with devastating effect against Hitler's air fleet. But it was the cockney standing his ground, the ordinary citizen doing fire-guard duty on the roof top, the fireman, the police, the soldiers tending the Ack-Acks who fought off the worst the Nazis could

send against them. The Edith Durants were the real heroes of that savage warfare.

"Eyty-eyte dyes ot it," Ex-Mayor Kidd of Bermondsey told me, shaking his head. "No water to drink, no gas to cook by, no electricity to see by, the streets full of rubble, that's wat Bermondsey was like during the Blitz." It was a fight to the finish between the Luftwaffe and London's little people. It was one of the world's decisive battles and London's little people won it.

ONE ironical memento of the Blitz is the extraordinary number of bombed churches. Some of Wren's finest works were gutted by high explosives and fire. St. Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe is typical. It was one of the later Wren churches, dating from 1692. Today only its charred walls remain. St. Bride's, Fleet Street; St. Andrew's, Holborn; St. Swithin's, Cannon Street; St. Stephen's, Walbrook—these Wren churches suffered a similar fate. The list of wrecked churches in England is long. As I walked about London I was increasingly amazed by the large number of churches hit in the Blitz. Not infrequently the buildings in the immediate vicinity still stood, perhaps only slightly damaged.

Did the Luftwaffe have a diabolical plan to destroy London's churches? I asked this question of army officers, ARP officials, the Mayor and ex-Mayor of Bermondsey, policemen and the man

in the street. Nobody seemed to think it was by design. It just seemed to happen that way. Not because the Nazis would not gladly do it. But in the words of the bobby alongside St. Paul's: "Fritz just isn't that good with 'is bombs. If 'e 'ad a been, then we wouldn't 'ave a rylewye stytion or a factory left in London." At Canterbury, of course, it was a different story. There the treasured monuments of England's past were targets of sheer vandalism.

And what of the future of wartime London? Many informed people think that the city may have to endure another Blitz before the war is over. They fear that the Nazis may yet try some furious blow against the British capital. You hear suggestions that Hitler may send his remaining bomber reserve against London in a last desperate gamble. That will mean more ruined buildings, more demolition and death. A few think Hitler may have a super-rocket gun, gas, or a germ weapon up his sleeve. No one believes he can succeed in knocking Britain out, but some think he may wreak considerable devastation. It is pretty generally taken for granted that London will not know security as long as the Reich holds out.

Big Ben symbolizes the city's attitude toward Hitler and his instruments of frightfulness. Every quarter hour its chimes voice the confidence that Londoners feel in the longer outlook. London carries on.

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

FIRST LINES OF FAMOUS POEMS

Here are the first lines of twenty well-known poems. Can you identify each poem and name the poet who wrote it? Allowing 5 points for each correct answer, a score of 60 is par, 70 is very good, 80 or better is excellent. You'll find the answers on page 39.

1. A thing of beauty is a joy forever.
2. Comrades, leave me here a while, while as yet 'tis early morn.
3. Drink to me only with thine eyes. . . .
4. Gather ye rosebuds while ye may. . . .
5. Go and catch a falling star. . . .
6. Grow old along with me!
7. Hail to thee, blithe spirit!
8. Hence, loathed Melancholy!
9. It is a beauteous evening, calm and free.
10. Let us go hence, my songs; she will not hear.
11. My hair is gray, but not with years. . . .
12. The blessed damozel leaned out. . . .
13. The curfew tolls the knell of parting day. . . .
14. The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year. . . .
15. The sea is calm tonight. . . .
16. The skies they were ashen and sober. . . .
17. The stag at eve had drunk his fill. . . .
18. 'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock. . . .
19. We caught the tread of dancing feet. . . .
20. With rue my heart is laden. . . .